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Brig Gen Mitch Neurock



Lt Col Rebecca Otey



Capt Amanda Wang

AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 38

Air Force JAG Corps Air Reserve Component with Brig Gen Mitch Neurock, Lt Col Rebecca Otey & Capt Amanda Wang - Part 1

HOST: MAJOR RICK HANRAHAN

GUESTS: BRIG GEN MITCH NEUROCK, LT COL REBECCA OTEY & CAPT AMANDA WANG

In today's interview, we speak with Brig Gen Mitch Neurock, Lt Col Rebecca Otey & Capt Amanda Wang about serving in the Air Reserve Component or ARC.

MAJOR RICK HANRAHAN:

We have a great two-part interview in store for anyone who may have an interest in serving their country part-time through the Air Force, JAG Corps, [Air Reserve Component](#) or ARC, which includes the Air Force Reserves and Air National Guard.

We have three guests on the show, including Brigadier [General Mitch Neurock](#), Lieutenant Colonel Rebecca Otey and Captain Amanda Wang, who will collectively share their stories and unique officer perspectives on serving in the Air Force JAG ARC, how they balance part-time service with their civilian careers, leverage their military training and professional development, and how to apply if interested. Here are a few clips from part one of the interview.

[background music]

SHOW EXCERPTS, LIEUTENANT COLONEL REBECCA OTEY:

I find the reserves to be colorful and vibrant with plenty of opportunities and a real desire to make it work for both me professionally and personally.

SHOW EXCERPTS, BRIGADIER GENERAL MITCH NEUROCK:

It eventually turned into my civilian career with the Department of Justice as an Assistant United States Attorney, doing appellate work, and it was based on the skill that I picked up in the Air Force that I took out into the civilian sector with me and then brought back to the military.

ANNOUNCER:

Welcome to The Air Force Judge Advocate General's Reporter Podcast, where we interview leaders, innovators, and influencers on the law, leadership, and best practices of the day. And now to your host from [The Air Force Judge Advocate General's School](#).

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Welcome to another episode from The Air Force Judge Advocate General's School at Maxwell Air Force Base. I'm your host, Major Rick Hanrahan. Remember, if you like the show, please consider subscribing on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or your favorite podcast platform and leaving a review. This helps us grow an outreach to the JAG Corps and beyond. [music fades out]

Well, we have a great interview in store for you today, especially for those who may have an interest in serving their country through the Air Force JAG Corps Air Reserve Component. In this interview we'll focus on a career in the reserves as a lawyer and judge advocate general. In a subsequent interview, we plan to discuss the same topic from an enlisted perspective with a few of our outstanding paralegals. For today's show, we have three remarkable guests to share their experience and how serving in a part time capacity as an Air Force JAG has been for them.

Brigadier General Neurock, Lieutenant Colonel Otey and Captain Wang, thank you for coming on the show today.

BRIG GEN NEUROCK:

It's great to be here. Thanks for having us.

LT COL OTEY:

Yes, thank you very much.

CAPT AMANDA WANG:

Excited to be here. Thank you.

GUEST INTRODUCTIONS

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Brigadier General Mitch Neurock is the Director, Operations and International Law, Office of the Judge Advocate General, Joint Base Andrews, Maryland. He oversees the provision of legal advice to the Air Force and Space Force regarding air and international law, space law, cyberspace and informational law, environmental law and aviation, and admiralty torts matters. General Neurock supervises a team of approximately 100 judge advocates, civilian attorneys and paralegals at 15 locations.

General Neurock entered the Air Force in 1992 and served on active duty at Air Force wings in the United States and abroad, as well as at the government Trial and Appellate Counsel Division in Washington, D.C. Upon leaving active duty in 1998 General Neurock continued his service in the Air Force Reserves which we're going to talk about today with assignments at the wing, numbered air force, major command, and air staff levels.

He returned to active duty in 2009 and served at the Pentagon as the Air Reserve Component Advisor to The Judge Advocate General, providing senior level advice on all matters concerning Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard programs. General Neurock reported to his current position in September of 2020 where he also serves as Mobilization Assistant to The Judge Advocate General.

Our second guest, Lieutenant Colonel Rebecca Otey, is a reservist assigned as the IMA to the Staff Judge Advocate, 87th Air Base Wing at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey. She supports the SJA in leading an office of more than 30 personnel including active duty and reserve judge advocates and paralegals and civilians responsible for providing legal services to 42,000 total force individuals.

Since becoming a reservist, she has been a deputy state's attorney in Addison County Vermont, specializing in all sexual assault and intimate domestic violence crimes for adults and juveniles. And now she is a partner in a local firm that specializes in litigation.

And our third guest, Captain Amanda Wang, serves as a Category A reservist currently assigned to the 419th Fighter Wing at Hill Air Force Base, Utah. She provides legal advice and services to wing leadership and unit members. In her civilian capacity, she is an attorney advisor at the Department of the Interior, Office of the Solicitor. I also note that she earned the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal for her work fostering animals and walking dogs for the Albuquerque Animal Welfare Department.

But once again, thank you so much for coming on today Brigadier General Neurock and Lieutenant Colonel Otey and Captain Wang. I'd like to start off our first question for General Neurock. If you could just, sir, provide a little more background on your current position and what you're focusing on right now.

BRIG GEN NEUROCK:

Sure. Thank you. You introduced me as the Director of Operations in International Law, which is correct. That is the job that I'm doing. I'm temporarily here on active duty. Been here since August of 2020 and I'm leading an active duty organization. But my reserve job is, as you mentioned, the Mobilization Assistant to The Judge Advocate General.

So that's a mouthful. What that means is that I'm the leader of the reserve judge advocates, you know, our reserve lawyers and our reserve paralegals all across the Air Force Reserve. So that's about 878 of us assigned at offices in the United States and also overseas. So we'll talk a little bit more about what our program is about, you know, throughout this interview, but what we're really focusing on is making sure that people's service is as meaningful as it can possibly be, both to the offices where we work and to us as individuals, you

know, making sure that our service is fulfilling and that we're actually making a difference. That's what we're really focused on.

You know, so many of us as lawyers, we went to law school looking for a line of work that would bring greater meaning to our lives. And so many of us are called to the practice of law because we feel that we ought to serve others, something bigger than ourselves. In our profession, that can take a lot of different forms, right? For some, it's serving the underprivileged or defending people accused of crimes if they can't afford legal representation, or prosecuting criminal cases, to help keep our community safe, or it could be environmental causes, you know, to protect our world for future generations.

And to some, it might not seem obvious immediately that military service fits that bill, too. But it does. It's a way to dedicate our best legal skills and talents for the good of our whole nation. And a lot of people who've served on full time active duty already know about our part-time reserve program. Many of them practiced as military judge advocates, and then they left active duty, went to civilian life, and then joined the Air Force Reserve to continue their service.

But a lot of people who've never served don't really know where to start or they think it's too late because they didn't start right after law school. But it is possible. And we have many, many people in uniform who established themselves as attorneys and then came directly to our part time program. As you know, it's a way of finding additional meaning in their lives, both personal and professional.

And what we want to talk about today is that part-time service, what it's all about, how it works, how you can contribute, how you can join, and what it'll be like. So, you can keep your civilian job and your civilian lifestyle. You know, maybe you've got roots in your local community or you've got commitments with family or

civilian job, and you can't necessarily pick up and move to, I don't know, Korea or something with the full time active duty program.

You can still serve, you can still serve as an Air Force lawyer on a part-time basis. That's what we're all about.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Well, thank you so much, sir. Much appreciated there. For Lieutenant Colonel Otey, could you maybe offer a little more background on your current position and what you're focusing on right now?

LT COL OTEY:

Yes, I would be happy to. So, right now, as you had said before, I'm attached to McGuire Air Force Base. It's in New Jersey. And my job is basically to be the backfill for the Staff Judge Advocate. So in a civilian term, if you had a law office, he would be the boss and he would be responsible for making sure the office runs and when he needs to leave or when he needs assistance or there is something going on in the office that needs more help, I'm the person that can come in and help fill that role to make sure that there's no gap for the office just because somebody gets deployed or somebody has to take vacation or things like that.

And my focus right now, honestly, is a lot of care for my reservists and the active duty personnel at McGuire, because we've been experiencing a lot of changes in how we serve and what opportunities we have to serve with COVID, even as attorneys, and to make sure that we're still getting all of the military justice aspects accomplished, even with COVID going on. So it's been a really interesting time to get to be an attorney and get to be an attorney with the reserves.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Well, thank you, ma'am. And for our third guest, Captain Wang, I think you're the newest to the ARC component. Could you also offer a little more background on your current position and what you're focusing on?

CAPT WANG:

Sure. Absolutely. So I'm—I was just recently reassigned to the 419th Fighter Wing at Hill Air Force Base in Utah. I'm a Cat A reservist which means I'm like a traditional reservist. I go there one weekend a month and I'm part of a reserve unit. So, while Colonel Otey is helping with an active duty unit, my entire unit that I'm working with is all other reservists.

So that's a really interesting change for me because I previously worked, as Colonel Otey does, with an active duty unit. So I'm looking forward to being more involved in the whole unit, not just in the legal office, but the whole unit as a whole. And so right now we are, we advise the reserve commander of the unit if he has any legal questions.

We also assist with discipline if any of the members need discipline. We advise how that would happen. I also draft wills, provide legal assistance to anyone in the unit who needs it and other duties as assigned, reviewing legal documents for—reviewing, like all sorts of documents for legal sufficiency, and things like that. But yeah, it's new to me because I just started there.

I was officially just assigned there in December, so I haven't done too much yet. But I am the Deputy Staff Judge Advocate for the legal office there, which means I'm assistant to the Staff Judge Advocate and it's a small legal office and I'm looking forward to learning more about how the whole unit works.

ACTIVE DUTY & RESERVES

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Well, great. Thank you so much. And I think the collective experience of all three of our guests today is going to be outstanding for our listeners to hear from everybody. So with that, I'd like to kind of dive into the first maybe substantive question for General Neurock and kind of just cut to the chase here, right, sir?

Why would someone want to serve in uniform part-time?

BRIG GEN NEUROCK:

Really, like we were mentioning a moment ago, it's a search for meaning, Rick, the opportunity to serve something that's bigger than yourself, to get an opportunity to work on something that will bring you personal and professional meaning and be able to do it in conjunction with your civilian life. So being a member of the Air Force Reserve as a judge advocate, it doesn't take the place of your civilian career, it compliments your civilian career. It will provide you with skills and experiences that you can use in your civilian life. And it also draws from those skills and experiences and the expertise that you've built up throughout your civilian career. And that makes the Air Force better. Makes the Air Force Reserve better. Makes the JAG Corps better. And those skills and experiences that people have found during their civilian careers, it's, we're really looking for the way to put that to the best use for the benefit of the JAG Corps and for the Air Force and Space Force.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

And sir, obviously in your career, you've been both on the active duty side and the reserve side. Can you offer little insights to that, to our listeners on maybe some of the differences between the two?

BRIG GEN NEUROCK:

The active duty well, first of all, both of them take—it's a life commitment, right? So when you're serving on active duty, obviously that's a 365 day per year commitment. It is what you do. It's where you live. It's the people that you work with and that you hang around with. Your life is wrapped up with your service as a member of the Air Force, as an active duty member. As a member of the reserve, you're still keeping that connection. And that connection is so valuable to us to maintain that connection with the Air Force and with the Air Force Reserve and with the rest of the JAG Corps. But you have the opportunity to expand on your personal life

and your professional life to draw in the work that you do as a civilian attorney also.

And what we're looking for there is people who want to serve part-time. They have civilian skills. Sometimes it's lawyers sometimes it's doing something else. Our judge advocates aren't all attorneys in their civilian lives. We have people who are stockbrokers. We have people who, you know, do all sorts of things in their civilian lives, and they're bringing that skill and their expertise to the Corps and working for the benefit of the Air Force and Space Force. But it's a part-time lifestyle where you're gonna keep your roots in your civilian community; you're not going to pick up and move every couple of years like the active duty force does. And really, that's what draws a lot of people to us is, you know, maybe they've served on active duty for a while and they want to move around all the time anymore and they want to set down roots in a community.

And that's where we come in. We have the opportunity. We provide that opportunity for you to set down those roots, become a part of your local community, become part of the local legal practice. And still be able to devote the skills that you have, both the ones that you got within the Air Force and those that you develop afterwards; to come and serve for the benefit of the Air Force and the Space Force and the Nation.

AIR RESERVE COMPONENT

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Thank you, sir. And just one more question before I go to our other guests on kind of why they decided to get into the reserve component. Just so we're clear for our guests, sir, could you elaborate a bit more on when you're talking about the Air Reserve Component? What is the Air Reserve Component and what are the different subcomponents of that?

BRIG GEN NEUROCK:

Great question. So, the—in the JAG Corps, we have the active duty JAG force that we talked about. Those are the people who are on—serving every day, day in, day out. The Air Reserve Component is made up of a couple of parts. There's the Air Force Reserve and there's also the Air National Guard. Now, in the JAG Corps, we've got about 2200 lawyers. There are about 1400 or so enlisted paralegals, about 350 civilian lawyers and about 500 civilian paralegals and assistants. Now, out of all of that, 656 JAG attorneys are in the Air Force Reserve. And our main job is to provide legal advice and guidance to commanders at all levels across the Air Force and the Space Force.

So we should make this clear. The JAG Corps does serve both forces. It serves the Air Force and it serves the Space Force. And we're led by a three star general. And we focus on three main practice areas with a lot of different nuances and specialties: military justice and discipline, civil law and litigation, and operations and international law. So our substantive legal work generally falls into one of these three domains.

And in the Air Reserve Component, we're supporting the active duty, full time staff, but we're also, as Captain Wang mentioned a moment ago, supporting reserve units. So there are a couple of different types of programs. Generally, two of them. One is to serve in a traditional reserve unit like Captain Wang does, or an in an Air National Guard unit. That's the one weekend a month, two weeks a year kind of schedule that, that a lot of people have heard of. And that program is good for people who are in court a lot during the week and can only really be free for weekend work in some cases. So a lot of state prosecutors, public defenders, people with a heavy deposition practice, people who generally aren't as available during the week tend to gravitate toward that weekend program.

But it has its drawbacks, though, weekend scheduling could be kind of rigid sometimes. You're expected to be there on the same weekend that everybody else is

there. And the program is a little smaller, not as many positions or locations available. So you may need to travel farther to perform duty there. And sometimes the mission requires that you get a phone call or an e-mail to work on an issue during the week. And that's just what national defense requires sometimes.

So our other program is the one that Lieutenant Colonel Otey is in. It's supporting an active duty office. So there there's more scheduling flexibility because you're not tied to a single weekend each month. After your initial training, you do two weeks a year plus an additional 12 days of service. So two weeks plus 12 days and you can schedule those 12 days in any way that works for you and the office where you are assigned. You can do those 12 days all at once. You can do them several days at a time, you could do a day at a time. Whatever works for you and for the office where you're assigned. So very flexible, but generally it needs to be done during the week because that's when active duty full time offices are open. We do have more locations there, and all of our overseas offices are like that.

So in general, the Air Reserve Component, it's the Air Force Reserve, and you're serving either in that traditional reserve program like Captain Wang or you're serving in the augmentee role that Colonel Otey is in, or you're serving in the Air National Guard. So those are the three parts of our program.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Well, thank you, sir, so much for that clarification. I know there's often confusion there, so I think that helps to alleviate some of that. So for Lieutenant Colonel Otey, if you could maybe share with our listeners a little more on your journey. I mean, you've had a unique career trajectory as well. And just going to hear about what drew you into the military at large and also to the Reserve Corps.

LT COL OTEY:

Absolutely. So I did have a different maybe career path than most. When I got out of law school. I did not go

straight into the reserves or active duty. I was actually a public defender in Miami, Florida, and then I was a private defense attorney in Miami, Florida, prior to coming in. And I came in because I was still just missing something and it was exactly what General Neurock had said.

It was that sense of a bigger community, of purpose of service. And I really liked feeling that. I mean, that was why I wanted to be an attorney was to help people. And so I joined active duty. I had an amazing time. I had great opportunities as an active duty JAG officer. But 4 years in, I was pregnant with my second child and I had gotten married after I was in the active duty and my husband was a full time police officer.

And so I really was afraid that I was going to have to choose between my family life of what I anticipated it looking like or my professional life. But then luckily, I talked to some great reservist JAGs who informed me that I just didn't realize all my wonderful options with the Air Force. And they were right. And so I transitioned into the reserves back in 2012 and I am still waiting on having a position I don't like.

I've found it fascinating. I find the reserves to be colorful and vibrant with plenty of opportunities and a real desire to make it work for both me professionally and personally. And, and to make it feel like I matter. And likewise, I feel like I get to give back in a very meaningful way, both to the community of the Air Force and to the United States as a whole, which makes me feel great.

It has definitely assisted me professionally in my civilian career. And I will say that my civilian career, I've always had bosses and colleagues who are more than happy to take advantage of all of my experiences and skill sets that I've developed as a civilian and use them in a meaningful way for my employment as a reservist in the Air Force.

MILITARY EXPERIENCE HELPFUL IN CIVILIAN CAREER

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Would you mind elaborating a little bit on that, on how your experiences within the military have helped you in your civilian career?

LT COL OTEY:

Yes, absolutely. So I was a prosecutor for the military when I first came in on active duty, and then I was a defense attorney for the military. Both of those opportunities allowed me to try really interesting cases, which helped me as a litigator, just develop. The more experience you have, the better I think you become. Additionally, when I came into the reserves, I had opportunities to do contract work, which I had not experienced before on my civilian side, which has helped me now in a general practice firm. Even though we focus on litigation, having that experience really assists me when I need to do something different because I do live in Vermont, so we're small, so sometimes we get more variety than some other firms would in a bigger city.

I've also had the opportunity to do some legal assistance. We do a lot of wills and estates in the military. That has been nothing but helpful for me. In my civilian life. And finally, because I'm so familiar with how the military works and how even some of our sister services work, when I've had military members or other individuals that on the outside are looking for assistance, either through family law matters, wills, or even sometimes, unfortunately, criminal matters, I'm able to provide a lot more meaningful assistance to them sometimes than somebody who has no understanding of their previous military experience or what is important to them to make sure that they can continue to serve and, say, have good contact with their kids or something else, even in a divorce situation.

CAREER BROADENING

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Well, ma'am, thank you for those great insights and for Captain Wang. Definitely want to hear about your journey. What prompted you to seek out a career in the Air Force Reserves?

CAPT WANG:

Thanks. Yeah, it was a really interesting journey for me. I started out after law school working in the civilian world as a public defender for the State of New Mexico. And I did that for three years. And then I transitioned to a job with the Social Security Administration, with their Office of Disability Adjudication and Review. And I had been there for a few years, and I realized I was getting concerned that my legal practice was shrinking, that I was only doing one kind of law, just disability law.

And I was concerned that, that might hinder my career in the future. So I wanted a way to diversify myself and keep myself active and current in other sorts of areas of the law besides disability law. I also noticed that Social Security, that a lot of the administrative law judges had previous JAG experience, whether it be Army or Air Force or Navy.

But I noticed, you know, within federal service, a lot of folks do have a military background. And I thought that it would be beneficial for me both to expand my career and because it kind of gives you that additional sense of community and understanding, you know, just other people who have similar—it's like being part of a club, right? So if other people have been former JAGs and you're also a JAG, that's just one more thing you have in common with them, another way to connect with people. Also, no one in my family had ever been in any branch of the military before, so I was kind of curious about what that was like. I like learning about things that are new and different.

This was completely outside of my skill set, and I just was like, well, let's find out more about it. So I had a few friends who had been active duty and then transitioned

to the reserves, so active duty JAG and then transitioned to the reserves, so I was familiar with it and they were like, you know, "you should join the reserves." And I thought, "Okay, yeah, sure, let me check it out."

So I did. And I think it has actually been really great for my civilian career. Because after seven years of Social Security, I was able to get a job with the Army Corps of Engineers. And I think, you know, Army Corps of Engineers is sort of—it's part of Department of Defense, and I think they really respected my Air Force JAG career. And so I think that was like a really good transition for me. And then from there, I was able to get my job with the Department of the Interior, Office of the Solicitor. And I've always wanted to do environmental law and natural resources law, so this is like the perfect job for me.

But I do think that the reserves really helped with my career progression, because I think otherwise it's a great way to get to do other areas of the law beyond what is in your civilian job. So that was really excellent. I've started rambling, so you may want to ask me another question.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

[laughter] No. Fascinating account there, Captain Wang. Obviously you've taken, looks like you came in to the reserve component and did it to help foster your professional development, and that has been quite successful from your part.

CAPT WANG:

Yeah, and I also I do, I love public service and that's, you know, just as General Neurock has been saying. Every single career I've ever had has been a public service career, you know, public defender. Now I'm working, I've always been a federal employee, but I, and the reason I thought that the reserves was so important was because I did want to help serve the active duty component.

Like, I know that I, for lots of reasons, I can't join the active duty JAG Corps, mostly travel and, you know, moving the whole family. But I do want to be able to help serve them. And I've had some really rewarding experiences.

A lot of these active duty bases that I've served at when I was an IMA reservist like Colonel Otey is now, have just been so busy and so these bases are really, really busy. And I can come in and be a fresh set of eyes and ears on different topics and I can augment them when they're really busy. So I've been able to help a lot, and they're always just so grateful for me being able to come in and help with ten wills that day or whatever. So I really enjoy being able to help them and I respect them and I like to be able to give back and then also being able to give back to all the military members that I serve through legal assistance and other things like that.

It's very, very rewarding and I, I really love it.

WELL-ROUNDEDNESS

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Well, thank you for sharing. So, General Neurock, these are two great examples, right, from Lieutenant Colonel Otey and Captain Wang on how they've been able to get into the Reserve Corps and leverage their training in the civilian sector. From your kind of perspective, sir, with the broad perspective that you have, is this fairly indicative of what you see from folks within the reserve component?

BRIG GEN NEUROCK:

People like Lieutenant Colonel Otey and Captain Wang are exactly what we look for in reserve judge advocates. They have developed legal skills, either on active duty or in the civilian sector or both in the case of Colonel Otey. But what we're looking for are people who have exactly that kind of well-roundedness. Those are the people who are going to be most effective serving in a part-time capacity.

What we typically look for are people who are experienced attorneys with, what I mean by that, I mean people with real experience representing real clients in actual matters, with real responsibility for an extended period of time. If that's the experience that you have, whether you got it on active duty as a judge advocate

or whether you developed it in the civilian sector, or whether it's a combination of both, that's the type of person we're looking for.

How much time is enough? I don't know. It depends on what you're doing in your civilian career. People straight out of law school tend to be less competitive for our program just because they haven't had the time to develop that experience that we're looking for. But for people who are in court all the time could be relatively soon, you know, maybe as short as a couple of years.

But what we see with Colonel Otey and Captain Wang are people who've really got that sense of public service, the commitment to public service, the commitment to finding a way to use our legal talents and legal skills in a way that benefits something that's bigger than just ourselves. And the willingness and openness to do things that are maybe outside the comfort zone, maybe something a little bit different.

And you never know. You might just find something that you do in the military turns into your civilian career. On active duty, one of the things that I did was something that I never expected to do. I was assigned to come work in an appellate position. I had never done appellate law, didn't do moot court in law school, but I was assigned to do appeals of court-martial cases, and it turned out I loved it. It was great. The people were terrific. The work was interesting. I enjoyed the academic back and forth with the judges, and it eventually turned into my civilian career with the Department of Justice as an Assistant United States Attorney doing appellate work. And it was based on the skill that I picked up in the Air Force that I took out into the civilian sector with me, and then brought back to the military as a way to make me a more effective judge advocate in the reserve program.

So what you see in, in our program with Colonel Otey and Captain Wang, it's completely indicative. This is what we're looking for. And we need, we want more just like them.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

[background music]

That concludes part one of our interview with Brigadier General Neurock, Lieutenant Colonel Otey and Captain Wang. Please tune into part two for the continuation of this interview. Thank you for listening. We'll catch you on the next episode.

ANNOUNCER:

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[music ends]

GLOSSARY

- **AFJAGS:** Air Force Judge Advocate General's School
- **ARC:** Air Reserve Component
- **IMA:** individual mobilization augmentee
- **JAG:** judge advocate general
- **SJA:** Staff Judge Advocate